The Family Stone

by
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Final Draft
April, 2005

Twentieth Century Fox
10201 West Pico Boulevard
Los Angeles, California 90035

OVER BLACK:

The insistent chirping of a cell phone.

MEREDITH (O.S.)
This is Meredith.

INT. BARNEY'S DEPARTMENT STORE - NEW YORK - DAY

MEREDITH MORTON barks into her cell phone, oblivious to the press of frantic Christmas shoppers, many of whom angle to get by.

Meredith is an immaculately, if rigidly, composed woman in her mid-thirties. She wears a charcoal gray suit that both silhouettes her striking figure and accentuates a nature that inclines people to move out of her path.

MEREDITH
For the last time, this is not a popularity contest! I don't care if it's the Friday before Christmas. She'll have Monday off. Look. Bottom line: there's no way I'm letting that report go without having seen it.

Meredith distractedly picks up and discards knickknacks and trinkets along the counters as she speaks, making her way over to EVERETT STONE.

Everett Stone is also in his mid-thirties and dressed as one of privilege, in a dark suit and a charcoal gray satin tie that nearly matches Meredith's suit.

Everett is Kennedy-handsome, but charmingly, seemingly without knowledge of the effect his beauty has on others---is having this very minute on the JITTERY CASHIER who fumbles in arranging a blue scarf with tissue in a gift box.

MEREDITH (CONT'D)
Everett. Is that for Amy?

Everett nods, opening his mouth to speak.

MEREDITH (CONT'D)
The red one.

Meredith holds up a finger, effectively putting Everett on hold, and returns to her conversation.

MEREDITH (CONT'D)
Well, then you need to figure out a way!

TITLES AND CREDITS

A series of vintage Christmas cards carries each individual film credit.

The last of these "Christmas cards" depicts a large house, set back on a lawn.

MATCH DISSOLVE
TO:

EXT. STONE HOUSE - DAY

In need of a fresh coat of white paint, but with all its black shutters intact, the Stone family's home speaks as much about classic New England durability as a well-worn pair of boots from L. L. Bean.

A Range Rover pulls up in the driveway to the left side of the house, near the side kitchen door and its steps.

THAD STONE and PATRICK THOMAS climb out of the car and begin unloading groceries from the back.

Both men, in their early thirties, have an easy handsomeness, enhanced by fastidious grooming. Both men tend toward Yankee conservatism in clothing. In fact, the only discernible difference between them is that Patrick is African American.

INT. STONE HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

A towering half-decorated Christmas tree twinkles with lights. At the base of the tree, surrounded by dog-eared boxes of ornaments, SYBIL STONE perches on the edge of an ottoman.

Strikingly beautiful in a vaguely exotic way, Sybil is in her late fifties or early sixties. It is easy to imagine the beauty she was at twenty, though she bears a more recent note of brittleness and fatigue.

She holds a snowflake-shaped ornament in her hand, but stares off into space, at nothing.

INT. STONE HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Burdened with the grocery bags, Thad and Patrick stumble through the outside door into the kitchen's cramped mud room, crowded with coats on pegs and a clothes washer and dryer.

THAD
Mom! Merry Christmas!

There is something just slightly "off" about Thad's voice.

INT. STONE HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Sybil snaps out of her reverie, hearing Thad.

SYBIL
Boys! Boys!

With a flourish, she hangs the snowflake ornament on the tree and runs for the kitchen.

INT. STONE HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

SYBIL
Thad! Patrick! You're here!!

Sybil enters, throwing herself into Thad and Patrick as they hoist their bags of groceries onto the counter.

PATRICK
We hit traffic.

They all embrace and kiss.

SYBIL
Wait! Patrick, I found another recipe on the Gourmet site this morning...

Sybil moves over to the large kitchen table, set in the curve of a bay window. The table holds a desktop computer and stacks and stacks and stacks of Christmas cards. She begins pecking at the computer's keys.

PATRICK
It better not be for onions, I e-mailed you my mother's recipe this morning...

THAD
Mom.

Sybil turns to look at Thad.

THAD (CONT'D)
When's Everett getting here?

Thad uses sign language to speak.

NOTE: Thad is completely deaf, and though he is able to read lips, he and the family always sign to each other. Thad also makes an effort to speak when he signs.

SYBIL
He promised they'd be here by dinner.

PATRICK
Did you hear from Ben? We didn't know when his flight was getting in-

SYBIL
Well, of course, he missed both morning flights--

The back door opens.

SYBIL (CONT'D)
(calling)
Honey, we're in here!

KELLY STONE enters from the mud room.

In his sixties, Kelly is still an impressive, strapping figure. Tall, with an out-sized head covered with a thatch of chaotic silver hair, Kelly carries a weathered briefcase and a paper plate wrapped in clear plastic.

KELLY
(holding up the plate)
Millie's famous brownies!

SYBIL
That is so sweet of her. Those are all for me!

THAD
Dad!

KELLY
Thaddeus!

Kelly embraces Thad, and then Patrick. They all kiss.

PATRICK
Merry Christmas.

EXT. STONE HOUSE - DAY

A battered Volvo pulls in behind Thad and Patrick's car.

Amy, the youngest of the Stone family, emerges from the car, slamming the door. In her late twenties, Amy meets her own luminous, natural beauty with an aggressive indifference. Her clothes are shapeless, if colorful.

The strap on one of Amy's public television totes breaks and its contents fall into a puddle on the driveway.

Amy just stands for a moment. Then she savagely throws the rest of her bags to the ground and stoops to retrieve her papers and books from the water.

EXT. ROAD - DAY

Everett's car passes a white clapboard church as it enters a quiet New England village.

INT. EVERETT'S CAR - DAY - MOVING

Meredith closes her cell phone and smiles apologetically at Everett.

MEREDITH
Sorry.

She turns her attention to the scenery as they ride in silence.

Meredith clears her throat, an unconscious tic.

Everett smiles and reaches for Meredith's hand.

EVERETT
You don't need to be nervous.

MEREDITH
(matter-of-factly)
I'm not.

Everett's smile falters and he turns his attention back to the road.

EVERETT
They're going to love you.

INT. STONE HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

AMY
I hate her!

KELLY
(reproving)
Amy.

AMY
What?

KELLY
(coaching)
Generosity. Generosity of spirit.

Amy looks to Sybil who just laughs.

SYBIL
You are going to get me in trouble.

PATRICK
I thought no one had met the girl.

AMY
No, I was down in New York in October--

KELLY
Oh, that's right! That young man. What is his name?

SYBIL
(warningly)
Kelly--

KELLY
How's that all working out?

Amy blinks fiercely but says nothing, turning her attention to unlacing her boots.

KELLY (CONT'D)
Oh, honey. I'm sorry...

SYBIL
So! You had dinner with them--

AMY
She is a total phoney! Completely uptight. She dragged us to this friggin' *stiff* restaurant! She talked the entire time, and--oh! Just wait! She's got this incredibly grotesque throat-clearing tic. Ecgh-Mm. Ecgh-Mm! It's like she's digging for clams.

The back door bangs open.

SUSANNAH
Make way for ducklings!

SUSANNAH STONE-TROUSDALE enters, burdened with bags.

In her late thirties, the oldest of all the Stone children, Susannah is so clearly the beauty Sybil was at her age. She carries her looks with a graceful effortlessness, though she is eight months pregnant.

Thad moves to help her as Susannah enters the kitchen, and ELIZABETH TROUSDALE, eight years old, shoots past.

ELIZABETH
Grandma!

Sybil catches Elizabeth in her arms, hugging and kissing, as Kelly seizes Susannah in an embrace.

KELLY
Susannah!

Susannah pulls back from Kelly.

SUSANNAH
Long drive. Gotta pee.

She hugs Thad, Amy and Patrick as she moves toward the back hall.

SUSANNAH (CONT'D)
(an afterthought)
Is Everett here yet?

SYBIL
Amy *was just telling us* all about Meredith. She's a throat-clearer.

AMY
ECGH-MM!

KELLY
Sybil, why do you encourage her?

PATRICK
Amy never likes anyone.

AMY
(stung)
Patrick?

Patrick turns from the sink to face Amy.

AMY (CONT'D)
I love you.

THAD
(laughs)
That took years.

Thad exits with Susannah's bags, carrying them deeper into the house through a swinging door.

AMY
Suss, you got her on the phone once, right?

SUSANNAH
A little curt.

AMY
She do that throat thing?

SUSANNAH
What are you talking about? I've got to pee. When's Ben getting here?

Thad bolts back into the room, signing excitedly.

THAD
They're here!

INT. EVERETT'S CAR - STONE HOUSE DRIVEWAY - DAY

EVERETT
You ready?

Meredith looks speculatively at the house.

EVERETT (CONT'D)
They're all watching, you know. Kelly'll come out in a minute and bring us in.

INT. STONE HOUSE - KELLY'S STUDY - DAY

Crowded at the front windows, everyone watches Everett circle the car and open the passenger door.

SYBIL
Okay. Okay. Here it comes.

Meredith tentatively steps out of the car.

SYBIL
(laughing)
Oh, my god.

AMY
I told you!

EXT. STONE HOUSE DRIVEWAY - DAY

KELLY
Everett!

Kelly bounds down the front steps and embraces Everett.

Everett releases Kelly and turns him to present Meredith, who offer her hand to shake.

KELLY
Ah. Meredith.

Kelly ignores Meredith's outstretched hand and seizes her in a bear hug.

INT. STONE HOUSE - FRONT HALL - DAY

EVERETT
Meredith, this is Thad! And Patrick--

Everett introduces Meredith to everyone.

MEREDITH
(shaking hands vigorously)
OH, Yes. Thaddeus, HELLO!
(MORE)

MEREDITH(cont'd)
I'M MEREDITH!! I'VE HEARD SO MUCH ABOUT YOU!!

EVERETT
And you remember Amy.

Meredith takes a full step backwards when she sees Amy.

THAD
(to Susannah)
Why is she shouting?

MEREDITH
Amy. Yes. Merry Christmas.

AMY
(icy)
Merry Christmas.

EVERETT
And this is Sybil! Mom, this is Meredith.

Meredith steps forward, offering her hand.

MEREDITH
You have a lovely home.

Sybil grabs Meredith's hand and pumps.

SYBIL
(coolly, enjoying herself)
All the better to entertain you, my dear. Merry Christmas. Welcome to our lovely home.

EVERETT
Susannah! Help!
(pulling Sybil away)
Mom, don't overdo it.

SYBIL
What am I overdoing?

Susannah steps in.

SUSANNAH
I'm Susannah. And this is Elizabeth--

ELIZABETH
You have nice shoes.

Everyone stops to look at Meredith's shoes.

MEREDITH
Thank you.

A silent, awkward beat.

KELLY
Okay, now! Let me get a picture!

AMY
Family picture! Family picture!

The family forms a sloppy circle at the base of the stairs, with Meredith on the outside, momentarily forgotten.

INT. STONE HOUSE - EVERETT'S BEDROOM - DAY

EVERETT
Why are you making such a big deal out of this? I mean, can it really matter?

Everett sets his and Meredith's suitcase on the bed.

MEREDITH
Um, yes, I think it matters. And, no, I am not sleeping with you in your bed in your parent's house.

EVERETT
Meredith, Sybil put us in here! Together.

MEREDITH
And I said, I don't think it's right.

INT. STONE HOUSE - BACK HALL - DAY

SYBIL
So, you two just don't screw, is that it?

EVERETT
Nice, Mom.

Everett has pulled Sybil into the back hall, just off the kitchen, which contains the house's back stairs, a small half bathroom, and a basement door.

SYBIL
Well, I'm not sure what I'm supposed to believe--

EVERETT
Mom, I know how fun it would be for you to make this really complicated, but--

SYBIL
Separate bedrooms? Everett, come on, this is just silly.

EVERETT
Look, she doesn't feel comfortable--

Sybil rolls her eyes, raising her voice for the benefit of those in the nearby kitchen.

SYBIL
Well, why *should* she be comfortable? PUTTING AMY OUT OF HER ROOM AND ALL!

AMY (O.S.)
(from the kitchen)
WHAT?!

INT. STONE HOUSE - AMY'S ATTIC BEDROOM - DAY

MEREDITH
I hope I'm not putting any one out.

AMY
(furious)
Me, out. You're putting me out.

Sybil makes the bed while Elizabeth examines the contents of Meredith's open suitcase.

ELIZABETH
Why aren't you sleeping in Everett's room? He's your friend isn't he? Did you have a fight?

MEREDITH
Of course not.

Elizabeth discovers a pair of pale pink pumps.

ELIZABETH
Can I try your shoes?

MEREDITH
Amy, I am so sorry...There must be someplace else I could--?

Meredith's phone goes off. She unfolds it and holds a "wait a sec." finger up to Amy.

MEREDITH (CONT'D)
This is Meredith.

Meredith turns her back on Amy, who drops her jaw incredulously.

MEREDITH (CONT'D)
Oh. Hold on.

Meredith turns back around and indicates her phone.

MEREDITH (CONT'D)
It's my sister.

A beat.

SYBIL
Oh! Well, we'll just be downstairs. Give you your privacy.

Sybil herds Amy and Elizabeth down the stairs while Meredith waits. Elizabeth clomps along in Meredith's shoes.

Once the coast is clear, Meredith returns to the phone.

MEREDITH
They hate me.
(a beat)
Yes, I'm being myself!

INT. STONE HOUSE - EVERETT'S BEDROOM - DAY

Everett hangs his suit jacket in the closet, though he still wears his shirt and tie.

He closes the closet door to find Meredith silently standing on the threshold to his room.

Without speaking, Everett returns to the suitcase on his bed.

MEREDITH
May I come in?

EVERETT
You don't need an invitation, Meredith.

Everett takes a pile of shirts to his bureau.

Meredith comes up behind him, sliding her arms through his, hugging him from behind.

MEREDITH
Don't be--

EVERETT
Mad? I'm not mad.
(teasing)
But, don't be thinking you're going to be getting any now.

Meredith softens, smiles.

Then she sees the pile of trophies laying in the bureau's open drawer.

She lifts out an inscribed plaque: Everett Stone, Most Valuable Player 1982.

MEREDITH
Why would you keep these in here? Don't you want to--?

EVERETT
That was a long time ago.

He gently takes the trophy from Meredith, placing it back inside the drawer he slides closed.

MEREDITH
This isn't easy for me. Meeting everyone.

Everett pulls Meredith to him, his arm around her.

EVERETT
(softly
I know. I know it's not.

Meredith catches sight of them in the mirror that hangs over the dresser.

MEREDITH
(whispering, conspiratorially)
Look at them.

Everett looks up, meeting Meredith's gaze in the mirror.

MEREDITH (CONT'D)
Just look at them.

Meredith turns in Everett's arms and nuzzles his neck.

MEREDITH (CONT'D)
Everett?

INT. STONE HOUSE - FRONT HALL - DAY

AMY
Oh, my god! Ben!

BEN
Amy!

Amy races to meet BEN STONE where he drops his suitcase at the base of the front stairs.

Ben, in his early thirties, shares the family's easy good looks beneath an ever-present stubble, frayed fatigues, and a pink polo shirt layered over a long-sleeve thermal.

AMY
What until you meet her!

BEN
Meet who?

AMY
Meredith!

Sybil enters from the kitchen, her voice proceeding her.

SYBIL
NO SMOKING POT IN THE HOUSE!! Do you hear me? No pot in the house. I mean it this time!

BEN
Merry Christmas, Mom.

Ben throws his arms around his mother.

SYBIL
And Christmas is not going to be clothing-optional this year! We've got company.

Elizabeth comes running after Sybil. She stumbles in Meredith's shoes, snapping off one of the heels, and lands in Ben's arms.

BEN
(kidding)
Oh, look! Who's this?

EVERETT
(descending the stairs)
Ben!

BEN
Everett! Everett in a tie!

Ben puts Elizabeth back on her feet and embraces Everett.

BEN
Look at you! You look gorgeous!

EVERETT
Yeah, that's true. Hey, Ben, I want you to meet Meredith.

Ben turns, looking up, to see Meredith cautiously stop on the stairs just above them.

Ben blinks.

MEREDITH
Hi.

Amy clocks Ben's stunned expression. She slaps the back of his head.

AMY
Hey!

Everett slaps Amy.

EVERETT
Hey!

BEN
Hi.

INT. STONE HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Ben in the lead, carrying Elizabeth over his shoulder, enters the kitchen where Susannah strings cranberries and popcorn garland at the table. Everyone trails in behind.

BEN
Hey, Mamma! I got your laundry here! A big sack of filthy Christmas laundry.

Ben deposits Elizabeth next to Susannah.

SUSANNAH
(embracing Ben)
Hey!

BEN
Where's your husband?

SUSANNAH
What husband?
(a beat, joking)
Oh! That one. He'll be here Christmas.

Ben embraces Thad.

BEN
Queen Bee!

THAD
(bowing)
Ari gato.

BEN
Ari gato. Where's Dad?

SYBIL
Ran away. Joined the circus.

EVERETT
A *better* circus.

PATRICK
Less clowns.

Meredith's attention is drawn by Elizabeth who teases the broken heel of Meredith's shoe.

Meredith steps forward, grabbing the shoe from the child.

SUSANNAH
Oh. Sorry. We might have some glue.

MEREDITH
No. I've...
(putting a bright face on it)
That's alright. I think I've got another pair for that outfit.

Meredith turns to escape, only to find herself blocked by Ben.

BEN
(his shirt, her shoes)
That's a good color.

MEREDITH
Excuse me.

Meredith slips by Ben, headed for the back stairs.

BEN
Now don't dilly-dally any there, pretty lady!

Meredith stops, turns.

BEN (CONT'D)
(sweetly, smiling)
We're all going to be down here talking about you.

Meredith blinks, then heads up the stairs.

Ben crosses back to the table, opposite Susannah, and pulls Thad down into his lap. He hugs Thad and grabs Everett's arm, pulling him in conspiratorially.

BEN (CONT'D)
You've got to remember Ms. Lewin--!

EVERETT
From second grade?

SYBIL
The one without the lips?

BEN
Man, I was so *into* her!

AMY
You. Are a freak.

BEN
Sweet, right? Incredible!

Everett grins, adjusting the knot of his tie in a preening, Oliver Hardy fashion.

EVERETT
I thank you, Sir.

BEN
(to Susannah)
Isn't she incredible?

SUSANNAH
Yes. It appears that she is incredible.

BEN
So, Everett, where did you find her?

INT. EVERETT'S CAR - NIGHT - MOVING

MEREDITH
Hong Kong! Last Spring.

Everett and Meredith occupy the front seat. Amy and Thad sit in the back, with Ben wedged between, Elizabeth on his lap.

MEREDITH (CONT'D)
Actually, over on Kowloon side, not Hong Kong island, although we were both *staying* over there, on Hong Kong island that is. Everett at the Grand Hyatt. I was at the Mandarin.

Only Ben is really listening, and he is rapt. Behind his back, Amy and Thad make faces. Amy occasionally signs parts of Meredith's monologue, but mostly she just makes a duck-bill with her hand, opening and closing it: Yak, yak, yak.

Everett keeps an eye on Amy and Thad in the rearview mirror.

MEREDITH (CONT'D)
But, we were *introduced* in the lobby of the Peninsula hotel.

Meredith cranes around to the back, for Thad's benefit.

MEREDITH (CONT'D)
THAT'S ON KOWLOON SIDE!

Thad nods, smiling blankly.

MEREDITH
Anyway, I was there for this post-post unification conference. And I had a meeting over at the Peninsula. So there I am, crossing the lobby, and who do I see but Rachel Graham!

AMY
Who?

BEN
What were you wearing?

INT. PIZZA PARLOR - NIGHT

MEREDITH
It had been what, ten years? More? God, almost sixteen! Andover!

Everyone waits for the pizzas to be boxed as Meredith continues, without breath.

Amy, Thad and Elizabeth sit glumly in a booth with Ben, who hangs on her every word.

MEREDITH
So there I am, catching up with Rachel, and here comes Everett. Of course, I didn't know him, but Rachel did. They'd gotten their Masters together. And you hadn't seen each other in, what was it, at least eight years!
(deep breath)
Anyway, the point is, Everett was lost. Remember?

Everett is busy paying the cashier.

EVERETT
What?

MEREDITH
How you were lost?

EVERETT
I'm pretty sure I was only pretending--

MEREDITH
He was on his way to take some boat out to-- What was the name of that place again?

INT. STONE HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

EVERETT
Lantau. Lantau Island.

The whole family is spread out, with pizza boxes and paper plates.

MEREDITH
Right. Some pilgrimage he'd gotten into his head. On his way out to see some Buddha statue at some monastery.

EVERETT
In fact, it's one of the world's largest metal Buddhas. Over three stories tall.

KELLY
Fascinating.

EVERETT
You can stay at this monastery. Actually share meals with the monks. But they've taken a vow of silence--

AMY
(pointedly)
A vow of what?

Everett makes a comically savage face at Amy.

AMY (CONT'D)
Your tie's crooked.

KELLY
That sounds incredible. Now how long were you there?

MEREDITH
Well, he never made it, of course.

Meredith delicately picks slices of pepperoni off the pizza she's hardly eating.

MEREDITH (CONT'D)
One thing led to another. Rachel suggested lunch. And we got to talking--

SUSANNAH
Everett, what did you two talk about?

EVERETT
(glaring)
I don't remember.

Amy reaches over and tries to loosen Everett's tie.

AMY
That looks a little tight.

EVERETT
(slapping her away)
It's fine!

SYBIL
Why don't you just take that goddamn thing off already?!

MEREDITH
(blithely, oblivious)
OH, Please! Of course, you remember! See, Everett was there on business with Steve. Working out their position for the IPO this spring. Well, of course that's what I do!

AMY
Really?

MEREDITH
Within the Asian market.
(struggling to ignore Amy's look)
Anyway, lunch led to drinks, which led to dinner. Rachel took off. And that's really how Everett and I spent our first night together! Me putting in my two cents, going over that report. I just showed Everett a few things that needed to be done.

Dead quiet; everyone looking at Meredith.

EVERETT
(lying, salvaging)
Meredith was a *real* help!

Meredith reaches out with a proprietary hand, and plucks a non-existent bit of lint from Everett's shoulder.

MEREDITH
We were just lucky. Both in the right place at the right time. Right, honey?

EVERETT
Right.

A long beat of silence.

SYBIL
Well!

Sybil gets up and begins to collect paper plates.

MEREDITH
Oh! Let me help you.

SYBIL
NO! I mean, please, don't trouble yourself. You're the guest.

MEREDITH
Then, maybe I'll just wash my hands.

Everett stands and escorts Meredith from the room.

INT. STONE HOUSE - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Meredith turns to face Everett.

MEREDITH
I told you--

Sybil appears behind Everett, headed for the kitchen.

EVERETT
(indicating the back hall bathroom to Meredith)
It's in there.

Meredith flees as Sybil sails past.

EVERETT
Mom.

INT. STONE HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Everett follows Sybil in.

EVERETT
Mom.

SYBIL
Yeah?

EVERETT
Mom, listen, I want to talk to you.

SYBIL
Oh, yes! I'm sure you do.

EVERETT
There's something I want to ask you.

SYBIL
I thought that might be it--

Patrick enters with the pizza boxes.

SYBIL (CONT'D)
Now is not the time.

INT. STONE HOUSE - KELLY'S STUDY - NIGHT

PATRICK *
"Billy Don't Be a Hero!" *

Thad collapses from his efforts of performing charades for the group that includes everyone but Sybil and Kelly. *

AMY *
That's a song? *

SUSANNAH *
Yes, it's a song. You've heard it. *

BEN *
Whose clue was that? It wasn't very good. *

Everyone looks at each other, finally zeroing in on Meredith, seated next to Everett, yet still on her own. *

She looks down, clearing her throat, straightening the hem of her skirt.

ELIZABETH
I want to go again.

Elizabeth reaches for the bowl of folded paper slips.

AMY
No. Wait. Meredith hasn't had a turn yet.

MEREDITH
(snapping to attention)
No. That's alright. I--

AMY
(digging in bowl, sorting)
Let me find one for you.

MEREDITH
I really don't--

EVERETT
Come on, Mere--

BEN
Yeah. Come on, *Mere*.

Reluctantly, Meredith stands and receives a hand-picked slip from a grinning Amy.

AMY
There. That one's perfect.

Meredith unfolds and reads. She lifts her eyes from the paper to Amy.

AMY
It's a movie.

Meredith squares herself, readying, but already defeated.

MEREDITH
Okay. Movie.

AMY
No talking.

EVERETT
Amy.

Meredith makes like a movie camera.

VARIOUS
Movie.

Meredith goes through the paces. Four words; second word.

Meredith mimes pulling a veil over her head.

BEN
Bee keeper.

Meredith looks at Ben, completely confused.

EVERETT
"Ulee's Gold?"

Meredith shakes her head and repeats the gesture, this time marching forward with a bride's halting gait.

SUSANNAH
Wedding!

EVERETT
Marriage!

Meredith mimes sliding a ring on her finger.

SUSANNAH
Ring!

PATRICK
Bride!

Meredith points at Patrick, grinning.

BEN
"Princess Bride!"

SUSANNAH
It's four words.

AMY
"Always a bridesmaid, never a bride." No, that's six--

EVERETT
You *know* what the answer is.

AMY
Just trying to help.

Meredith continues: Third word. She pantomimes getting dressed.

VARIOUS
"Pants!" "Hose?" "Putting on?"

Meredith abandons her attempts.

She holds up four fingers.

VARIOUS
Fourth word.

Meredith stops, thinks.

PATRICK
(coaxing)
It's okay. Fourth word...

Meredith gestures at Patrick.

AMY
I can't believe you're pointing at him.

Meredith looks at Amy, hand still extended toward Patrick.

PATRICK
What?

BEN
Who?

Confused, Meredith looks at Patrick.

MEREDITH
No. I--. He--

AMY
You're *totally* pointing at him!

Everyone looks at Meredith, standing, isolated.

BEN
Which guy?

MEREDITH
I wasn't pointing at him--

AMY
You still *are*!

MEREDITH
No, I'm not!

AMY
(feigned incredulity)
Oh, my god!

BEN
Is he a clue?

THAD
The fourth word?

Meredith turns to Patrick again.

MEREDITH
I wasn't.

And she's gone, headed for the front stairs.

EVERETT
(leaping up, following)
Meredith--

BEN
Oh, come on, Mere--

EVERETT
(exiting)
You guys are such unbelievable jerks.

BEN
Meredith, don't quit!

PATRICK
What just happened?

BEN
Shorty, fetch that for me, please.

Elizabeth retrieves the slip of paper Meredith dropped on the floor, bringing it to Ben.

SUSANNAH
What was the answer?

BEN
(reading)
"The Bride Wore Black."

Amy shrugs, as if she herself cannot believe it.

PATRICK
Thank you. Amy.

Ben hauls Amy off the couch in a headlock.

BEN
Why do you always have to be such a meanie?

AMY
(pulling free)
Don't!

INT. STONE HOUSE - AMY'S ATTIC BEDROOM - NIGHT

MEREDITH
What did I *ever* do to her?!

Meredith struggles to hang her clothes in Amy's over-stuffed closet.

EVERETT
You can't let her just run you off like that. She's only getting back at you for taking her room--

MEREDITH
Yeah. Some help you were in that department. The natives would never *dream* of letting their god sleep on a couch. Not when they've got me to blame--

EVERETT
(laughs)
Okay, Meredith. Now you're being--

Meredith spins from the closet to face Everett.

MEREDITH
I am not a completely ridiculous person.

Everett freezes. A beat.

MEREDITH
I can see you beginning to look at me like they do.

Everett collapses onto Amy's bed in feigned exhaustion.

EVERETT
Not true.

MEREDITH
Isn't it? You're telling me you're not wondering why you brought me here? That you're not beginning to have doubts?

EVERETT
(rote)
No.

MEREDITH
That you don't wish that I were different?

A beat.

EVERETT
Different, how?

Meredith stops in stunned silence, turns, mouth agape.

EVERETT (CONT'D)
A joke! That was a joke!

Everett gets up, circles her in his arms.

MEREDITH
I wouldn't want you just because you were a good guy who got caught up in something and then couldn't find the brake.

EVERETT
(seductively)
Hey, I'm not a good guy.

Meredith looks at Everett and smiles almost sadly.

MEREDITH
Yeah, you are.

INT. STONE HOUSE - SYBIL AND KELLY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

SYBIL
He's coming for that ring. That's what he wants to talk to me about.

Sybil sits in bed with a book, while Kelly undresses.

SYBIL
He intends to give that girl my mother's wedding ring.

KELLY
What I don't understand is what he sees in her.

SYBIL
(laughing)
I knew it! I was on to you!

Kelly comes to lay in bed next to Sybil.

KELLY
No, I don't mean that. She is an attractive woman. She's intelligent. Obviously successful. She's better mannered than any of us--

SYBIL
Oh, give me a break. You stick a silver spoon up any monkey's butt and it's bound to say "please" and "thank you." Like, some trick.

KELLY
She is a fine woman.

SYBIL
(laughs)
Oh, so fine!

KELLY
It's just that she doesn't seem to trust or know herself very well.

SYBIL
Thank you, professor.

KELLY
Which means, I'm afraid, that our Everett may not know himself at all.

A beat.

EXT. TOWNSHIP - DAWN

The sun breaks over the distant mountains, striking the sides of red brick academic buildings on campus, white church steeples, and the dark sandstone of the town hall.

EXT. STONE HOUSE - DAWN

The pink dawn is reflected in the house's dark windows.

INT. STONE HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Sybil doesn't turn from the window when Meredith enters.

SYBIL
You're up early. Sleep all right?

MEREDITH
Thank you. Has Everett--?

Amy enters from the other kitchen entrance wearing a sweatshirt over a nightgown. She rubs her arms. Her hair is a chaotic tangle. She looks exhausted.

AMY
It's freezing. Is there coffee?

SYBIL
Coming up.

MEREDITH
Good morning, Amy.

Amy smiles thinly at Meredith and crosses to the table, dropping into a chair and turning her attention to a crossword puzzle.

Sybil and Meredith watch the coffee maker.

Sybil goes to the table and picks up a stack of Christmas cards and a letter opener, bringing them to the counter.

SYBIL
Oh, Amy, I meant to tell you, we got a card from the Stevensons the other day.
(playing innocent)
You remember Brad, don't you?

AMY
Very funny.

SYBIL
Brad. Brad Stevenson. Still in town. Still available.

AMY
(working the crossword)
Yeah. Well.

Sybil lines up three mugs on the counter and turns to Meredith.

SYBIL (CONT'D)
Brad popped Amy's cherry.

AMY
Mom!

SYBIL
Oh, I'm sorry, dear. Is that not accurate?
(to Meredith)
Poor guy's still holding out for her. Guess he got a taste of something he liked--

AMY
Okay, Mom! Could you not?

Sybil pours herself a mug of coffee and heads for the hall swinging door.

SYBIL
(exiting)
Milk's in the fridge, if you need it.

Meredith goes to the fridge, finds the milk.

MEREDITH
(turning)
Amy, you take milk?

AMY
(taking the milk from Meredith)
I'll do it.

Amy carries the milk to the counter.

Meredith joins her and they prepare their coffees in silence.

Meredith clears her throat.

MEREDITH
I'm really sorry you had to sleep on the couch last night. Maybe we can take turns--

AMY
Don't sweat it.

Amy heads back for the table.

MEREDITH
I wish you'd give me a chance.
Whatever it is that I did wrong--

AMY
I said. Don't sweat it.

Amy picks up her crossword and heads for the back hall.

MEREDITH
(pursuing)
I...I don't know what I did to you.
I really don't. But you know, I
don't care whether you like me or
not.

Amy stops and turns, a slow smile of victory spreads across her face.

AMY
Oh, of course you do.

Amy mounts the back stairs, leaving Meredith alone.

INT. STONE HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

The whole family, but for Ben and the Elizabeth, watches through the window as Everett opens the trunk of his car for Meredith.

PATRICK
She's going to the Inn?

THAD
What excuse did she give?

SUSANNAH
Something about having a bad back.

Outside, using brute strength, Meredith hoists her heavy suitcase into the trunk.

SUSANNAH
Said she could get them to put a
board under her mattress at the
Inn.

AMY
Ecgh-Mm!

KELLY
Amy, please be the kind child I know you to be.

SYBIL
Well. We are definitely in trouble now.

INT. STONE HOUSE - FRONT HALL - DAY

Just outside the living room, Ben, wearing a pair of ratty sweat pants, slung dangerously low, and a blown-out T-shirt, sets a mug of coffee down on a bench.

He sits and begins to pull on a pair of snow boots.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Outside, Everett turns toward the house, looking directly toward this window and its clustered spectators.

PATRICK
Busted!

SUSANNAH
Here he comes!

INT. STONE HOUSE - FRONT HALL - DAY

The family races from the living room, passing Ben as they dash for the kitchen.

A beat.

Everett blasts through the front door and marches past Ben towards the kitchen.

EVERETT
Morning.

BEN
Morning.

INT. STONE HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Everett enters to find everyone engrossed in various, suddenly critical tasks, Elizabeth at the table.

EVERETT
Excuse me, family.

SYBIL
Oh, Everett!

EVERETT
I just want to know who said something to her.

SYBIL
To whom, dear?

EVERETT
Meredith is checking into the Inn.

SYBIL
Yes, we'd heard something about that--

EVERETT
And now her sister, Julie, is coming to join her--

SUSANNAH
Her sister?

EVERETT
Her sister, Julie, whom I have never met, is giving up Christmas with her own family, in order to be with Meredith.

AMY
Come on! Now she called her sister?

EVERETT
That's it!

Everett violently slams an empty chair into the table.

Everybody freezes, silenced. Elizabeth gapes, cereal spoon suspended in front of her mouth.

EVERETT (CONT'D)
I see what's going on here. I mean, I knew it wasn't going to be easy with you guys. I just figured you'd give her a hard time, have a good laugh, but then back off.

SYBIL
Everett--

EVERETT
(holding up a hand)
Please. Mom.
(to the room, offering)
Now, if this is about me...

Nobody bites.

EVERETT (CONT'D)
Okay. This is how this is going to go: You're all going to pull your fangs out of her, and remind yourselves that whatever it is you think she is, Meredith's somebody that means a lot to me.
(menacing Amy)
So you'd better start getting used to the idea.

AMY
(small)
Jeeze. Okay.

Everett burns the room with one last look, and heads out.

KELLY
Everett--

EVERETT
I expected a little more at least of you.

INT. STONE HOUSE - FRONT HALL - DAY

Ben picks up the mug of coffee and heads out the front door.

EXT. STONE HOUSE - DRIVEWAY - DAY

Meredith jumps when Ben knocks on the passenger window with the mug of coffee.

Reluctantly, she scrolls the window down.

MEREDITH
(impatient)
What?

BEN
(a little thrown)
Oh. Well, you know, the coffee's not too good over there at the Inn.

MEREDITH
Oh.

Meredith takes the mug, doing her best not to look at Ben's body, barely concealed by the sweats and frayed T-shirt.

MEREDITH
Thank you.

BEN
So, uh, you're coming back, right? You'll come back?

MEREDITH
I'm just checking in.

BEN
Good. Good deal.

Nodding, Ben stretches, arching his back, as he surveys the neighborhood.

BEN
Whoa. Boy. What a day.

Meredith takes a sip of coffee and gestures with the mug.

MEREDITH
Well. Thank you.

BEN
I had a dream about you last night.

MEREDITH
What?

BEN
I did. I had a dream about you.

MEREDITH
(cautiously)
What...what was I doing?

BEN
(laughing)
Well...

EVERETT
Let's go.

Everett arrives at the car, going for the driver's side.

EVERETT (CONT'D)
Ben, you coming?

BEN
(to Meredith)
Oh, yeah, don't forget to bring the mug back. It's Sybil's favorite. She'll kill you.

INT. STONE HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Everyone is gathered, except for Everett and Meredith.

KELLY
So, we're in agreement, then?

Everyone nods halfheartedly.

KELLY (CONT'D)
We are going to welcome Meredith back, without judgement. We will welcome her and her sister, Julie, into our home, with open arms. And we are *all* going to do our best to behave as a civilized family *might*. Right, Amy?

AMY
Why do you keep singling me out?

KELLY
Imagine what she's had to have felt in order to call her sister.

SUSANNAH
She *is* staying. You've got to give her credit for that.

BEN
I'd like to say something here, if I may.

SYBIL
Forget it! And I *know* you gave her my mug.

AMY
Can we just vote Ben off the island?

BEN
I'm ashamed of all of you.

PATRICK
Oh, like that's news.

SYBIL
He's going to ask me for that ring. I know it.

BEN
He can't marry her.

AMY
Um. *Thank* you! Where have you been?

BEN
They don't even love each other.

SYBIL
You just watch. He's going to ask me for that ring.

SUSANNAH
Mom, enough about the ring.

INT. STONE HOUSE - KELLY'S STUDY - DAY

SYBIL
What ring?

Everett closes the door for privacy and comes to kneel in front of Sybil, where she perches on the edge of the couch.

EVERETT
Grandma's wedding ring?

SYBIL
Oh.

EVERETT
Mom, this is the woman I'm going to marry.

SYBIL
We're talking about Meredith, right?

EVERETT
Mom. Remember when I was dating Becket Royce? And you said to me--

SYBIL
Boy, *she* was great now, wasn't she? Whatever happened to--?

EVERETT
And you said that when I met the woman who was to be my wife, I should come to you. I should come to you, because you wanted that woman to wear your mother's wedding ring. Well, I have met that woman. And I am asking you for the ring you promised me. I want to give it to Meredith tomorrow. On Christmas.

Sybil looks at her hand, held in Everett's.

EVERETT (CONT'D)
Mom.

A beat.

SYBIL
No.

EVERETT
Mom!

SYBIL
No. I'm sorry. I am. But, no. That woman--

EVERETT
(standing, exasperated)
That woman!

SYBIL
Meredith. Okay, Meredith! Everett, I am not going to give you *my* mother's wedding ring so that you can--

EVERETT
You made a promise to me!

SYBIL
Tough shit.
(more gently, reasonable)
Look, I know you're disappointed, but think how I feel.

INT. STONE HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

SYBIL
Oh, goddamnit! Who had the last of the coffee and didn't make more?

Sybil enters, beeline for the coffee maker. Meredith stands at the sink while Patrick works at the counter.

SYBIL (CONT'D)
There is supposed to be a pot right here, and it's--! Who doesn't know the rules?

MEREDITH
(trembling)
I was just washing the pot. I'm sorry.

SYBIL
You're back.

PATRICK
It's okay. I'll make more coffee.

Sybil crosses to her table.

SYBIL
And who put all this crap on my desk?!

PATRICK
(to Sybil, pointedly)
Meredith's making breakfast.

Meredith begins to clear away the pans and canned tomatoes from the kitchen table.

MEREDITH
For tomorrow. Christmas morning. Strada. It's a Morton family tradition. I know that you and Patrick have the dinner all planned out, but I wanted to be able to contribute something.
(MORE)

MEREDITH(cont'd)
And my sister's coming. I just wanted to do something for everyone.

Sybil looks to Patrick, who narrows his eyes at her.

SYBIL
Oh. Well. That should be nice.

Meredith smiles, as Sybil sits.

SYBIL (CONT'D)
Everything all right at the Inn?

MEREDITH
Yes. Thank you.

SYBIL
I hope they were able to put you in a room near Thad and Patrick.

Sybil now sees her clean mug sitting on the table.

SYBIL (CONT'D)
Thank you for bringing my mug back.

EXT. JEWELRY STORE - ESTABLISHING - DAY

INT. JEWELRY STORE - DAY

MRS. AUSTEN, an attractive woman in her fifties, stands behind a counter, facing Everett and Thad.

MRS. AUSTEN
Going to be a lot of broken hearts in this town...

EVERETT
What do you think about this one?

Everett holds up an over-large ring for Thad to examine.

MRS. AUSTEN
That's a beautiful choice. Platinum setting. I believe that's a three karat stone.

EVERETT
And that's good?

Mrs. Austen smiles knowingly.

EVERETT (CONT'D)
Thad, what do you think? Is it big enough?

MRS. AUSTEN
Let me just look up the specifics on that one...

Mrs. Austen toddles to the back of the store.

Thad puts his hand on Everett's arm.

EVERETT
You see a different one?

THAD
Don't do it.

EVERETT
What?

THAD
Marry her, Everett. Please, don't marry her.

EVERETT
Thad--
(decisive)
I am. Getting. Married.

THAD
Is this...is this about Mom?

Everett looks at the ring.

EVERETT
(quietly)
Of course, this is about Mom.

Mrs. Austen returns with a binder.

MRS. AUSTEN
Here we are!

INT. STONE HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Meredith and Patrick are in the midst of cooking when Susannah pokes her head in.

MEREDITH
Oh, hi, Susannah!

Susannah gives a wave to Meredith, who goes back to breaking eggs into a bowl.

SUSANNAH
Have you guys seen Mom?

PATRICK
Yeah. I think she's taking a nap.

Patrick and Susannah exchange a look.

Meredith begins whipping her eggs, oblivious, as Susannah heads back out.

INT. STONE HOUSE - UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - DAY

Susannah knocks on the door to Sybil and Kelly's room.

There is no answer.

INT. STONE HOUSE - KELLY AND SYBIL'S BEDROOM - DAY

Quietly, Susannah opens the door and enters, to find Sybil sleeping on her bed.

Susannah approaches the bed, slips out of her shoes.

Gently, Susannah climbs onto the bed, laying down, draping an arm around Sybil, spooning her mother.

A beat.

Sybil opens her eyes but doesn't turn.

They lay like this for a moment, silently.

Sybil's eyes narrow and she turns to face Susannah, raising herself up on an elbow.

SYBIL
All right. Who else knows?

EXT. ATHLETIC FIELD - DAY

Ben exhales a lungful of air, tapping a small pipe against the edge of the weathered wooden bleachers on which he sits, emptying the bowl.

KELLY
You want a brownie?

Kelly, seated beside him, offers the plate of Millie's brownies to Ben.

BEN
No, thanks.

They sit high up on the bleachers, overlooking the empty football field.

BEN
So, it's worse this time. Isn't it?

KELLY
What do you mean?

BEN
Mom, Dad. I mean Mom.

Kelly doesn't speak.

He looks down and folds the plastic wrap around the plate.

KELLY
It's not good. We only found out a couple weeks ago.

BEN
But, you've known longer than that.

KELLY
Not for sure. And then she wanted to wait. Until after Christmas. To tell you kids.

They sit for a beat.

Kelly rubs at his eyes and then turns to Ben, who weeps silently.

KELLY (CONT'D)
Oh, Ben...I know...

INT. STONE HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Meredith pours an egg batter into two large low cooking trays. Patrick and Sybil observe her work.

MEREDITH
Now, you pour the eggs over this. Add a little more oregano. Some Parmesan.
(MORE)

MEREDITH(cont'd)
Then you let them sit in the fridge overnight. They just bake a bit in the morning.

SYBIL
Are those mushrooms?

MEREDITH
Yes, those are mushrooms.

PATRICK
Isn't Everett allergic to mushrooms?

MEREDITH
He is?

The back door bangs open and Ben and Kelly enter.

Ben goes over to Sybil and encircles her in his arms. She hugs him and releases him, but he doesn't let go. He just keeps hanging onto her.

Sybil laughs and pats Ben's arms.

SYBIL (CONT'D)
Okay, honey.

BEN
(muffled in Sybil's neck)
I love you, Mom. I love you.

Sybil shoots an accusing glance at Kelly, who looks away.

Amy enters.

AMY
What's wrong? What's going on?

Sybil pulls herself away from Ben.

SYBIL
You and Daddy have fun getting stoned?

Sybil pursues Kelly out of the room.

Ben rubs his eyes, then spots Meredith picking mushrooms from the egg mixture. He ambles over.

BEN
Okay. What have we got going on over here in Santa's workshop? What can I do to be of service?

He slings an arm around Meredith's shoulders.

BEN (CONT'D)
Meredith, what can I do to make you happy?

MEREDITH
(squirming)
I think I'm all set. Everett had some errands to run and then he and Thad were going to meet Julie's bus.

BEN
Are those mushrooms?

MEREDITH
I didn't know!!

EXT. TOWN COMMON - BUS STOP - DUSK

Everett checks his watch.

He and Thad stand on the edge of the Common as a Greyhound bus turns the far corner onto this Street.

All the trees on the Common are spun with white lights. Wreaths hang on the lamp posts.

The bus pulls up and the doors open.

THAD
What does she look like?

EVERETT
I only saw a picture of her once.

Everett walks along the length of the bus, straining to see inside, as people disembark.

Finally, JULIE MORTON appears, framed by the bus's door, high atop the steep interior steps.

She is, simply, beautiful. In her late twenties, with hair one shade lighter than Meredith's, Julie's clothes are put together with a singular, but modest, bohemian flair.

THAD
Is that her?

Everett watches Julie navigate the steps with a duffle bag.

He moves forward and Julie looks up, her eyes snagging on Everett for just an instant...

EVERETT
I think--

...and she falls.

She hits the ground outside the bus, hard.

Everett rushes forward, meeting the driver at Julie's side.

DRIVER
Are you alright, Miss?

EVERETT
Julie? Are you hurt?

JULIE
(shaken)
I'm okay. I'm okay.

DRIVER
Do you think you can stand?

JULIE
Yeah, I'm--. I'm fine.

Everett and the driver help Julie unsteadily to her feet, as Thad collects her purse and bag.

EVERETT
What is it?

JULIE
(rubbing)
Nothing. It's my knee.

Everett stoops down, placing his hands on Julie's knee, feeling, testing.

DRIVER
I'm sorry. I didn't see you--

JULIE
No, it's totally my fault.

EVERETT
Can you bend it?

Julie tentatively uses Everett's shoulder to steady herself as she flexes her leg.

INT. STONE HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Ben assists Meredith in placing her pans of strada in the refrigerator. He hands one to her.

BEN
You got that?

MEREDITH
I'm set.

The last pan in place, Meredith steps away from Ben who begins to forage within the fridge.

JULIE
Please. You've all got to stop!

SYBIL
Really? Are you sure?

Meredith watches the entire family minister to Julie, seated at the kitchen table.

JULIE
(holding out her hand)
Look, it's not even bleeding, now.

Amy enters from the back hall with a box of Band-Aids.

AMY
These are like a million years old--

EVERETT
What took you so long?

Everett snatches the box from Amy.

JULIE
(good natured teasing)
Ah. Amy. The mean sister.

PATRICK
You got that right.

Amy smiles, but punches Patrick.

JULIE
(to Patrick)
And you're with Thad, right?

PATRICK
Patrick. Merry Christmas.

Meredith steps in, taking the box from Everett.

MEREDITH
Here. Let me help you with that.
(to Julie)
Why don't we go into the bathroom?

Ben turns from the fridge as the sisters pass by.

Both he and Everett track their course to the back hall.

Sybil leans into Kelly, whispering conspiratorially.

SYBIL
God, what a great kid! Perfect for Ben.

INT. STONE HOUSE - BACK HALLWAY - BATHROOM - NIGHT

JULIE
You're kidding.

Meredith affixes a bandage to Julie's hand.

MEREDITH
Strada. For tomorrow--

JULIE
Meredith, what am I doing here? You're *cooking*? Everything's alright, *now*? What did you have me come for?

MEREDITH
(accusing)
Well! They *certainly* like you, don't they?

INT. STONE HOUSE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

KELLY
Julie, why don't you tell us a little about what it is that you do?

The entire family is seated with Kelly and Sybil at the table's heads. Everett and Meredith sit across from Ben and Julie. Amy sits next to Kelly. Plates of food are passed.

JULIE
Me? I review artists' grants proposals.

MEREDITH
At the Rockefeller Foundation.

SYBIL
Ben's a documentary film editor.

BEN
(grinding Sybil)
And Amy's a teacher, and Thad's an architect... *So?*

JULIE
Are you in New York?

SYBIL
San Francisco.

Ben signs: I live in Berkeley.

Thad laughs.

SYBIL (CONT'D)
I was not speaking for you!

Ben signs: What do you call it?

Sybil signs.

ELIZABETH
Grandma signed something *really*, really bad.

SUSANNAH
Yes, Elizabeth Tattletale.
(throwing a look at Sybil)
I saw what Grandma spelled.

BEN
So, how is it that you and Everett have never met?

Everett and Julie look at one another.

MEREDITH
Julie's impossible. She's been travelling all year.

INT. STONE HOUSE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT - LATER

JULIE
And so your being deaf--

PATRICK
Actually, we were amazed by how little issue the agency had about the hearing thing.

THAD
There were so many more questions about our history as a couple.

PATRICK
And money.

JULIE
This may be personal, but do you have a preference about the child's race?

Meredith blinks.

MEREDITH
(cautioning)
Julie.

BEN
I want a little black baby.

EVERETT
Don't you have a little black baby?

BEN
Can you dig it?

JULIE
(embarrassed)
I'm sorry--

Patrick and Thad look at each other.

PATRICK
It totally doesn't matter to us.

JULIE
(looking at her hands)
I was just wondering.

THAD
Julie.

Julie looks up.

THAD (CONT'D)
We're just so excited about having this child at all. Really.

Julie smiles, reassured, glancing at Everett, who has been staring.

MEREDITH
I'm sorry. I would sign, but I don't know the language.

PATRICK
It's okay.

MEREDITH
Well, do you boys believe in Nature or Nurture? I mean, is it at all a concern in terms of bringing a child into your house?

PATRICK
I'm not sure I follow you.

THAD
Why wouldn't we bring it into the house?

MEREDITH
I just mean the gay thing. I mean, there's no irrefutable evidence one way or the other. Yes, they think they've isolated a gene, but what does that mean? They don't know what the gene is for, or what it does.

SUSANNAH
Didn't they determine it's for window treatments?

MEREDITH
One of the contributing factors to being gay may very well be the environment--

SYBIL
Look at my drapes! Aren't they horrible? There is absolutely no way it was this environment.

KELLY
Meredith, most of us here believe that sexual orientation is the result of a genetic predisposition, much like handedness.

BEN
"Handedness?"

EVERETT
Well, that *and* Mom, who tried to make us all gay.

SYBIL
I did not *try*, Everett. I *hoped*. I hoped you would all be gay. All my boys. Then you would never leave me. Sorry girls.

THAD
Sybil asked me when I was eight years old if I was gay.

BEN
She asked all of us that.

EVERETT
Yeah, Thad. Stop pretending you're so *special*.

PATRICK
Ben, are you sure you're not gay?

BEN
Hey. I'm here. I'm queer. Get used to it.

SYBIL
I gave up hope on Ben years ago.

MEREDITH
You didn't really--. You didn't really *hope* for gay children did you?

A beat as everyone stops and looks at Meredith.

MEREDITH (CONT'D)
Well, I don't think anyone wishes for that.

JULIE
Meredith--

AMY
Ecgh-Mmm!

MEREDITH
No. I'm sorry. Please, don't misunderstand me. It's just, well, I only meant--. What I mean to say is, that no parent would hope for a child to be challenged--

THAD
(knowing full well)
I'm sorry, I didn't hear a word you said.

MEREDITH
(stumbling)
This isn't coming out right. What I mean to say is: Life is hard enough as it is. It seems to me, you wouldn't want it to be any more *difficult* for your child. I mean, Patrick, you must understand what I'm trying to say, right?

THAD
What did she say?

PATRICK
(in Amos & Andy mode)
Boss, we's done been hit twice!

MEREDITH
No! Please! I'm sorry. I didn't mean--Really!

EVERETT
(losing patience)
Meredith, why don't you try saying what it is that you *do* mean?

MEREDITH
(stung)
Everett--

KELLY
That's enough.

MEREDITH
I'm so sorry.

KELLY
That's enough.

MEREDITH
I just think any parent would want a *normal*--

SYBIL
Oh, *goddamn* you!

KELLY
Sybil.

SYBIL
Don't "Sybil" me!

MEREDITH
For the child's sake! Just to make it *easier* for the child!

KELLY
(slamming the table)
That is enough!

A long, silent beat.

MEREDITH
I'm so sorry.

KELLY
(quietly)
That's enough.

EVERETT
Dad.

KELLY
It's enough, Everett. It's too much.

MEREDITH
Excuse me.

Meredith flees the table in tears.

A quick beat before Everett gets up to go after her.

INT. STONE HOUSE - BACK HALLWAY - NIGHT

Meredith reaches the bathroom, just as Everett comes after her through the swinging door to the hall.

EVERETT
Meredith, hold on a minute--

Meredith turns inside the bathroom and slams the door on Everett.

MEREDITH
Thanks a lot!

INT. STONE HOUSE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Julie sits looking at her hands, seemingly reluctant to meet the eyes of any member of this family, as they all listen to Everett trying to coax Meredith from the bathroom.

JULIE
I know how she can seem. But, she isn't really like--

SYBIL
Hey, you!

Julie's head snaps up, but Sybil isn't talking to her.

SYBIL (CONT'D)
You!

Sybil throws her fork the length of the table, where it lands in front of Thad, getting his attention.

In signing, Sybil's hands tremble with as much emotion as her choked voice.

SYBIL (CONT'D)
I love y--
(pauses, breathes)
And you are more *normal* than any other asshole sitting at this table.

Sybil has a finger pointed at Thad.

SYBIL (CONT'D)
Okay?

Thad nods.

SYBIL (CONT'D)
Okay.

Sybil turns to her plate, searches her place setting.

SYBIL (CONT'D)
I need a fork.

Everett returns.

SUSANNAH
Is she okay?

EVERETT
How would you feel?

They all hear the back door open and slam shut.

EXT. STONE HOUSE - DRIVEWAY - NIGHT

Frantic and hysterical, Meredith dumps her purse out on the seat of Everett's car, pawing for the keys.

She jams the key in the ignition and struggles with the gear shift, blind with tears.

She turns around, to navigate backing out of the drive, and steps on the gas.

The car hurtles backward, fishtailing across the lawn, right into a tree.

INT. STONE HOUSE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Everyone, except Thad, hears the terrific contact of the car and tree.

EXT. STONE HOUSE - DRIVEWAY - NIGHT

Flailing, Meredith gets the car in gear and hits the gas.

INT. STONE HOUSE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Again, there is the loud impact of the car and another tree.

AMY
(laughing)
Oh, no!

SYBIL
Amy! Not funny.

JULIE
I'm going to go--

BEN
No, let me.

Ben gets up and heads out.

A beat as people turn their attention to Everett, who picks up his plate and heads for the kitchen.

EVERETT
Excuse me. I've lost my appetite.

EXT. STONE HOUSE - DRIVEWAY - NIGHT

Everett's car idles beneath the branches of another tree in the front yard, the naked bulb of one of its taillights hanging by a wire over the rear bumper.

Ben comes and knocks on the driver's window, through which he can see Meredith, resting her head on the steering wheel.

Meredith looks up.

Reluctantly, she rolls down the window.

BEN
(imitating a State Trooper)
There seem to be a problem here, Ma'am?

Meredith falls across the seat, weeping.

BEN (CONT'D)
Move over. I know a place we can go.

INT. STONE HOUSE - FRONT HALL - NIGHT

Everett hangs up the phone in the small nook under the front stairs.

From the open kitchen door, Sybil sees Everett in the hall.

SYBIL
Any luck?

Everett fixes her with a glare and heads for Kelly's study.

INT. STONE HOUSE - KELLY'S STUDY - NIGHT

Kelly, Thad, Amy and Patrick half-watch television as Julie reads quietly to Elizabeth.

Julie looks at her watch and looks up as Everett enters.

EVERETT
I'm going to go look for them.

PATRICK
Everett, take our car.

Patrick fishes his keys from his pocket.

JULIE
Wait. I'm going with you.

Julie plucks the keys from Patrick's outstretched hand and leads the way.

JULIE
Let's go.

EXT. INN - NIGHT - ESTABLISHING

INT. INN - NIGHT

Julie comes down the stairs to the lobby, where Everett waits. A college-age RECEPTIONIST reads a book on the other side of the counter.

JULIE
She's not in our room.

EVERETT
(to receptionist)
You're sure there are no messages?

JULIE
Where would he have taken her?

INT. O'MALLEY'S BAR - NIGHT

Ben carries two bottles of beer to a table, where he and Meredith are camped out.

Meredith empties a bottle as Ben places another in front of her. Several empty shot glasses litter the table.

MEREDITH
I am *not* a bad person.

BEN
You're a total mess. Look at you.

MEREDITH
I am?

BEN
I mean that in the best possible sense, of course. You know that.

MEREDITH
I do?

He nods.

MEREDITH
(defensively)
I love the gays! Gay people!

BEN
They know that.

MEREDITH
Then, why? I took her to the nicest restaurant I know, and she didn't say one word to me. Not one word. All evening. But, I tried. And I try, and I--
(pauses, thinking)
I would have slept on the couch!

Ben places a hand over Meredith's.

BEN
Maybe you should stop.

Meredith looks at Ben, his hand over hers.

BEN (CONT'D)
Just stop. Stop trying. It's exhausting. Trying to keep that lid screwed on so tight. Just... *Relax*.

He leans back, hands clasped behind his head, demonstrating.

BEN
Try it.

Meredith raises her arms, clasping her hands behind her head, attempting to lean back.

MEREDITH
I'm...I'm not comfortable.

BEN
Here's the thing, Meredith: You have a freak flag. You just don't fly it.

EXT. MAIN STREET - NIGHT

Everett and Julie slowly walk the length of shops along the quiet avenue.

JULIE
It was the first totem pole to be raised in that community in a hundred years. And it was just because this guy...this, I guess he was a fisherman, would wander around, you know, from bar to bar, talking about how he had this hole in his heart. That's how he put it. Said he couldn't sleep. Would just lie there in bed, because of this hole in his heart.

Julie glances at Everett, who has been watching her intently. She smiles bashfully.

JULIE (CONT'D)
Anyway. The community got together and, I guess, they found this log...you don't even want to hear this.

Everett reaches out for Julie's arm, stopping her.

EVERETT
No. Tell me.

Julie looks at Everett's hand on her arm. He takes it away and she begins walking again.

JULIE
Well.
(laughs)
They got the guy a log.
(sobering)
He'd never carved a thing before in his life. It took him five years. I flew there for the raising. Just this tiny, tiny island off the coast. The whole town was there.
(pauses)
(MORE)

JULIE(cont'd)
It was...incredible. You just couldn't look at it without crying.

EVERETT
I'd love to see it.

They've come to a stop in front of a shop window and simply stand, looking at each other, as if trying to read the other's mind.

JULIE
Well, it's there for you.

INT. O'MALLEY'S BAR - NIGHT

BRAD STEVENSON and DAVID SILVER enter the bar. Both wear EMT worker uniforms.

Brad Stevenson is a nice enough looking guy; Amy's age, affable, with a generous smile.

David Silver is a little older and more nondescript.

Brad spots Ben as they make their way toward the bar.

BRAD
Ben? Ben Stone?

BEN
Holy crow, Brad!

BRAD
Merry Christmas! You remember David from school.

BEN
Sure. Hey, David! What are you guys doing, working tonight?

DAVID
We just got off--

BRAD
(searching the bar)
Are you here with Amy?

BEN
No. I'm sorry. This is Meredith. Meredith Morton, Brad Stevenson and David Silver. Meredith's Everett's... Um...Meredith's--

MEREDITH
Hold the phone! *Brad*? *Brad Stevenson*! Oh, my god! Aren't you the guy that popped Amy's cherry?

BRAD
Do I know you?

MEREDITH
Oh, this is too good! You gotta let me buy you a drink. What do you say?
(to David)
You, too. What'd you say your name was? That's what I'm gonna do! I'm gonna buy you boys some beers.

Meredith rifles through her purse, looking for her wallet.

MEREDITH (CONT'D)
Everybody in here! Bartender! I'd like to buy a round for the house!

EXT. MAIN STREET - NIGHT

EVERETT
Do you feel like you chose?

JULIE
What do you--?

EVERETT
I don't know. Chose your life. Said, "this is the thing that I'm going to do. These are the things I want." And not necessarily because you were good at this one thing, or because it's what everyone told you you should want, because everyone told you that's who you were...

Julie doesn't answer, but watches Everett as they continue walking along the line of shops.

EVERETT (CONT'D)
I mean, this artists' grants work. How did you know that that's what you'd be passionate about?

JULIE
(laughs)
Who said I was passionate about it?

EVERETT
No. Don't do that.

Everett places a hand on Julie's arm, stopping her.

EVERETT (CONT'D)
Don't joke.

Julie turns to face Everett.

EVERETT (CONT'D)
You know, I keep thinking about this monastery I missed seeing in Hong Kong. Like that's an important thing.

JULIE
Then you should go.

EVERETT
I want to go to Alaska. I want to see that totem pole. That thing that felt like a hole in the center of that guy. The thing that he needed to make, just so he could sleep.

INT. O'MALLEY'S BAR - NIGHT

Maxine Nightingale singing "Right Back Where We Started From" kicks in on the jukebox.

MEREDITH
Oh! That's my song! Finally! My song!

Meredith leaps out of the booth and begins dancing.

MEREDITH (CONT'D)
Brad! Dance with me!

Brad shoots Ben a helpless look.

BEN
Better do what she says, Brad.

Meredith grabs Brad's hands, pulls him to his feet and out onto the floor where she shakes him around.

MEREDITH
So, Brad, listen. You tell me. I don't know what I did to her. I don't know what I said--

BRAD
You know, I haven't seen Amy in over a year, I'm not sure I can help you--

MEREDITH
You haven't seen her in over a year?
(pauses, appraising)
How you gonna get her, Brad? Huh? How do you think you're gonna get her like that?

BRAD
I don't even know if she wants to see me...

MEREDITH
Of course she does! Look, I like you, Brad. You should come over tomorrow. It's Christmas! I'm making breakfast. *I'm* inviting you. You come over tomorrow.

DAVID
You guys want another beer?

MEREDITH
Oh, yes!
(another thought)
Wait!

Meredith stumbles over to the table and leans in low.

MEREDITH (CONT'D)
You know what would be great? You know what would be just, like, the most perfect thing right now? If we could figure out where to get a little pot.

INT. INN - HALLWAY - NIGHT

JULIE
Maybe they went back to the house.

Julie and Everett stand on opposite sides of the open door to Meredith and Julie's room.

EVERETT
Do you want to get some coffee?

JULIE
No.

EVERETT
(not hearing her answer)
I don't know, some coffee or something?

Julie doesn't answer this time but smiles at Everett.

EVERETT (CONT'D)
I just...I thought...

Julie merely stands, her face pressed against the door, half in, half out of the room.

Everett shifts his weight and moves a little closer to Julie.

EVERETT (CONT'D)
It's funny...

JULIE
What is?

EVERETT
(simply)
This.

JULIE
Everett--

Everett looks at Julie, searching her face.

JULIE
You know, I...
(shaking her head gently)
I can't.

A quality of hopefulness leaves Everett.

Julie offers a small smile.

JULIE
So...

They hold for a beat, then Julie slowly closes the door.

JULIE
Good night. Okay?

Everett nods as he backs away.

JULIE
Good night.

The door closes, leaving Everett alone in the empty hallway.

INT. INN - BATHROOM - NIGHT

Julie washes and dries her face with shaking hands, avoiding her reflection in the mirror.

There is a knock at the door.

INT. INN - GUEST ROOM - NIGHT

Despite herself, and doing her best to conceal the smile on her face, Julie rushes to the door and flings it open, to find Kelly.

JULIE
Oh!

KELLY
Oh!

JULIE
Mister Stone.

KELLY
No, it's Kelly, please, Julie. I don't mean to disturb you. Is Meredith here?

JULIE
She hasn't shown up yet--

KELLY
Ah. Because I...I'd like to apologize to her. And I'd like to apologize to you also.

INT. STONE HOUSE - UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - NIGHT

Everett reaches the top of the stairs and passes Sybil and Kelly's open bedroom door without looking inside.

SYBIL
Everett?

Everett backs up and stands in the doorway, not looking at Sybil propped up in bed with a book.

SYBIL (CONT'D)
Honey. I'm really sorry. I--

EVERETT
I'm not really sure I believe that.

Everett heads down the hall.

SYBIL
Everett?

In answer; the slam of his door.

EXT. MUNICIPAL GARAGE - NIGHT

Everett's car is pulled up alongside the metal skinned building, between parked snowplows and piles of road salt.

INT. EVERETT'S CAR - NIGHT

MEREDITH
So, what was that dream?

Meredith pulls the pins from her hair, letting it fall.

BEN
Which--?

MEREDITH
You told me you had a dream about me, but you didn't finish. You didn't say what I was doing.

Ben looks at Meredith in the dim light.

A beat.

BEN
You were shoveling snow.

MEREDITH
I--What?

BEN
You were just a little girl. In a flannel nightgown. And you were shoveling snow from the walk in front of our house.

Meredith watches Ben. There is a shift in her expression that could be clarity of mind, if not sobriety.

BEN (CONT'D)
And I was the snow. I was the snow and everywhere it landed. Everything it covered.

Ben regards Meredith a beat, then casts his gaze out the window, at the night sky.

BEN
(almost sadly)
And you scooped me up. With a big red shovel. You scooped me up.

INT. STONE HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Patrick switches off the coffee maker and all but one light.

He turns to Thad, who stands with his coat on in the mud room entrance, smiling, holding Patrick's coat.

Patrick stops when he sees Thad smiling at him.

PATRICK
What?

Thad shrugs and shakes his head slowly, still smiling.

THAD
Nothing.

Patrick comes and takes his coat from Thad.

The back door opens behind them and Kelly enters.

KELLY
(voice lowered)
Hey. Is everyone asleep?

INT. STONE HOUSE - KELLY'S STUDY - NIGHT

Susannah talks to her husband on her cell phone. Amy is passed out, her head nestled in Susannah's lap, near her pregnant stomach.

Susannah smiles and waves as Kelly comes in and sits on the arm of the couch. He leans over and strokes Amy's hair.

KELLY
She's nice like this, isn't she?

SUSANNAH
John says, hello.

KELLY
Merry Christmas. I'm going up to bed.

Kelly kisses Susannah and heads for the hall.

SUSANNAH
(on the phone)
Okay, I'm going to go, too. We'll see you tomorrow night. Merry Christmas. I will. I love you, too.

She hangs up and folds the phone.

KELLY
You coming up?

Susannah indicates the television, on which **Meet Me in St. Louis** is showing.

SUSANNAH
Are you kidding? This is my favorite part.

Kelly stands under the light of the hallway, looking at his pregnant daughter.

KELLY
Merry Christmas, my Susannah.

SUSANNAH
Merry Christmas, Daddy.

Kelly heads up the stairs and Susannah searches for the television's remote.

INT. STONE HOUSE - SYBIL AND KELLY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Kelly sits down carefully on the edge of the bed and removes his shoes, rousing Sybil, who has been asleep under her book.

SYBIL
Hi, there.

Kelly crawls up on the bed, next to Sybil.

KELLY
Hello.

Kelly rests his head on Sybil's chest and she gently rakes her fingers through his hair.

SYBIL
You need a haircut.

KELLY
Mm.

Sybil continues running her fingers through his hair.

SYBIL
You should see how mad he is at me.

A beat.

SYBIL (CONT'D)
It's not her, you know. It's not her. I feel sorry for her. I do. It's just that he's going to make this mistake.

Kelly raises himself on an elbow.

SYBIL
And I won't be here.

A long pause.

SYBIL
I only want him to be happy.

KELLY
He'll be fine. We all will. No matter what. You'll see.

SYBIL
Kelly. I'm scared.

INT. STONE HOUSE - KELLY'S STUDY - NIGHT

Susannah watches Judy Garland sing "Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas" to Margaret O'Brien. The song plays over the following sequence.

Crying, she plucks Kleenex from a box.

EXT. CAMPUS - NIGHT

Thad and Patrick make their way toward the inn.

INT. STONE HOUSE - SYBIL AND KELLY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Kelly pulls back from kissing Sybil.

With familiar fingers, he unbuttons the front of Sybil's nightgown, folding it back to reveal the scars of a double mastectomy, several years old.

He tenderly traces the line of one scar with his finger tips.

He looks at Sybil and their eyes meet.

Sybil reaches for Kelly.

INT. STONE HOUSE - KELLY'S STUDY - NIGHT

Susannah wipes away more tears, resting a hand on her swollen stomach.

Judy Garland continues to sing.

INT. INN - GUEST ROOM - NIGHT

Julie sits at the window, looking out at the quiet street.

She sees Thad and Patrick making their way to the Inn.

INT. STONE HOUSE - EVERETT'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Everett sits on the edge of his bed, in boxer shorts.

He hits the "send" button on his cell phone, listening to a phone ring and ring and ring on the other end.

In his other hand is an open jewelry box, with the ring he and Thad had looked at earlier in the day.

INT. EVERETT'S CAR - NIGHT

Meredith and Ben are passed out, her head on his chest.

Meredith's cell phone lays on the floor of the passenger side footwell, chirping and chirping and chirping.

EXT. MUNICIPAL GARAGE - NIGHT

Above Everett's car, the night is full of a million twinkling stars and the insistent tone of Meredith's unanswered phone.

As "Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas" ends, there is only the sound of the cell phone.

FADE TO BLACK.

FADE IN:

EXT. TOWNSHIP - DAWN

Church bells peal as the sun crests the distant hills, suffusing the town Common with soft orange light.

EXT. STONE HOUSE - MORNING

Everett's car is pulled up, half on the driveway, two wheels on the lawn.

INT. STONE HOUSE - FRONT HALL - MORNING

Elizabeth pounds down the stairs, headed for her Christmas stocking.

She pass Kelly, on his way up, with a mug of coffee.

ELIZABETH
Merry Christmas, Grandpa!!

KELLY
Merry Christmas, granddaughter.

INT. STONE HOUSE - BEN'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Meredith stirs awake at the sound of footsteps.

She blinks, squinting against the light, and what must be a horrendous hangover. She is alone in bed, but there is the hiss of a shower running nearby.

She looks around the unfamiliar room, at the 70's rock posters and hippie funk.

INT. STONE HOUSE - UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - MORNING

Kelly comes down the hallway, sipping his coffee and stops at the closed door to Ben's room.

He knocks.

KELLY
Ben?

INT. STONE HOUSE - BEN'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Meredith hears Kelly. She also sees her clothes thrown on the floor next to the bed.

MEREDITH
Ohmygod! Ohmygod-Ohmygod-Ohmygod.

KELLY (O.S.)
(knocking again)
Ben?

Meredith reaches to gather her clothes as Kelly opens the bedroom door.

KELLY (CONT'D)
Ben--

Meredith is frozen; half in and half out of bed, the sheet wrapped around her, eyes screwed shut.

KELLY (CONT'D)
OH! Excuse me.

Kelly can't get out quickly enough. He closes the door.

Meredith remains frozen.

INT. STONE HOUSE - UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - MORNING

Kelly stands with his hand still on the doorknob, blinking at the closed door.

INT. STONE HOUSE - KITCHEN - MORNING

Sybil enters as Everett pours himself a cup of coffee.

EVERETT
Well, my car's back.

SYBIL
Merry Christmas.

Sybil gets her mug from the draining rack and sets it down next to Everett's. He fills it.

From the pocket of her bathrobe, Sybil removes an antique leather ring box and places this next to Everett's mug.

SYBIL (CONT'D)
Don't be a jerk. I said, merry Christmas.

Sybil takes her mug and heads for the table.

EVERETT
Dad put you up to this.

Sybil spins to face Everett.

SYBIL
I think you and I need to get something straight--

EVERETT
Here we go.

Kelly enters.

KELLY
Sybil--

SYBIL
Not now, Kelly.

KELLY
Sybil, I--

SYBIL
Jesus, Kelly, I said, "not now."

Kelly makes a face and leaves.

Sybil turns her attention back to Everett as she seats herself on the edge of the table.

SYBIL (CONT'D)
You've had a charmed life, kid. I blame myself.

EVERETT
(laughs)
Mom, you've never made anyone's life easier.

SYBIL
(laughing)
The hell you know about it?

EVERETT
Oh, I know a little.

Everett examines the ring box.

A beat.

SYBIL (CONT'D)
I'm sick, honey.

Everett's back stiffens.

SYBIL (CONT'D)
And you can't fix it.

Everett turns slowly to face his mother.

SYBIL (CONT'D)
Not even by getting married.

Everett dissolves as he crosses to Sybil.

EVERETT
Mom--

SYBIL
Look, I know this is probably a really tall order, but I need you to do me a favor and try not to be so perfect. Alright?

EVERETT
(shaking his head)
Mom. Believe me, I'm far from perfect.

SYBIL
I'd hate for you to miss out on something because you've got some picture in your head.

She lays a hand on Everett.

SYBIL (CONT'D)
Or thought you could change something that you can't. I'd hate for you not to find what you really want. But, it's your ring, Everett. It's your decision.

JULIE (O.S.)
I'll find it.

Julie enters, still in her coat, through the swinging door, and freezes, mid stride, seeing Everett and Sybil.

JULIE (CONT'D)
Oh.

EVERETT
Julie!

JULIE
I was just getting coffee--. I'm sorry!

She does a fast about-face, but Everett leaps up from the table and catches her.

EVERETT
No! Julie, wait!

INT. STONE HOUSE - BEN'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Meredith dressed, attempts to smooth her hair into normalcy.

She opens the bedroom door a crack and peeks out.

Behind her, the adjoining bathroom door opens. Naked and wet, freshly shaved, Ben uses a towel to dry his hair.

BEN
Hey, there you are.

Meredith jumps and slams the door closed.

BEN (CONT'D)
How'd you sleep?

In three long strides, Meredith crosses the room, pulling her arm back, winding up.

INT. STONE HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - MORNING

BEN (O.S.)
OWWW!!

Kelly and Susannah and Patrick all glance up at the ceiling, hearing Ben.

INT. STONE HOUSE - KITCHEN - MORNING

JULIE
(painfully)
It's beautiful.

Everett takes his grandmother's ring out of the box.

EVERETT
Try it on.

JULIE
No!

EVERETT
Come on, try it on. I want to see if it fits.

JULIE
No. My hands are bigger than Meredith's, anyway.

EVERETT
Come on, I just want to see--

SYBIL
Isn't that sort of bad luck?

JULIE
Yes! It's very bad luck!

Kelly enters.

KELLY
Sybil, my love, is now a better time for you?

JULIE
Everett, no!

Everett manages to slip the ring on Julie's finger.

It's as if a spell is cast. Julie is suddenly calm, entranced, bewitched. She stares at her hand, adorned with the ring, held in Everett's.

JULIE (CONT'D)
Oh. Gosh. It really is beautiful.

Julie looks up, meeting Everett's eyes.

They hold a long beat.

Sybil turns from Everett and Julie to Kelly, mouth agape.

Everett can't look away from Julie.

EVERETT
Julie...

Kelly floats in behind Everett's shoulder

KELLY
(voice down)
Okay, Everett. What's going on?

EVERETT
(softly)
Julie--

Julie pulls her hand from Everett and begins to remove the ring.

JULIE
It's a beautiful ring, Everett. I--

She suddenly looks down at the ring.

JULIE
I...I...

Her head snaps up and she looks at Sybil.

SYBIL
(already knowing)
No.

EVERETT
What?

JULIE (CONT'D)
I can't--

SYBIL
Soap. We'll just use a little soap.

As a group, they all move to the sink, where Sybil squirts a great gob of dish washing liquid on Julie's hand and runs it under a stream of water.

Susannah enters.

SUSANNAH
Where'd everyone go? Come on, we want to open some presents!

SYBIL
Anything?

Julie shakes her head.

EVERETT
Is it stuck?

SUSANNAH
What's stuck?

JULIE
Of course, it's stuck! I told you, my hands are--

SYBIL
Butter.

Sybil retrieves a stick of butter from the fridge.

Patrick and Elizabeth wander in.

PATRICK
Hey, let's get the show on the road, people!

JULIE
Oh, *god*!

Sybil lathers Julie's hand up with butter.

SYBIL
(gently, regrettably)
I hate to say it, but be careful of the setting.

EVERETT
(to the newcomers)
She can't get it off.

PATRICK
Can't get what off?

EVERETT
Grandma's ring.

JULIE
I'm not doing this on purpose!

EVERETT
(apologizing)
I didn't say that!

ELIZABETH
Is she all right?

JULIE
I'm fine!

INT. STONE HOUSE - UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - MORNING

Meredith comes out of Ben's room.

Ben grabs her arm at the door, while trying to keep the towel up around his waist.

BEN
Meredith, wait!

MEREDITH
How dare you!

Meredith jerks her arm free and heads down the hall.

BEN
Wait! Meredith!

INT. STONE HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Thad enters.

THAD
Are we opening presents, or what?

He takes in the scene at the sink.

THAD
Why is Julie crying?

JULIE
I'm not crying!

But she is.

Everyone stops, looks at Julie.

She runs from the kitchen to the bathroom off the back stairs.

EVERETT
Julie!

SYBIL
Julie!

They follow.

INT. STONE HOUSE - BACK HALL - DAY

Julie slips into the bathroom, spinning and shutting the door, just as Meredith spills off the back stairs into the narrow hall where she nearly collides with Everett and Sybil.

MEREDITH
OH!

EVERETT
Meredith! Where have you been?

MEREDITH
(brightly)
I just got here!

Kelly arrives, hearing Meredith's lie.

SYBIL
(knocking on the door)
Julie, dear, are you alright?

MEREDITH
Julie?
(to everyone else)
What's she doing in there?
(MORE)

MEREDITH(cont'd)
(calling)
Julie?

JULIE (O.S.)
Meredith, is that you?

MEREDITH
Julie, let me in!

The bathroom door opens a crack. Meredith slips in and closes the door behind herself.

AMY
What is all the racket?!

Amy enters from the kitchen, clearly having just woken up.

At the same time, Ben comes down the stairs.

BEN
Merry Christmas!

EVERETT
Merry Christmas.

Kelly seizes Ben by the back of the neck and pulls him out of the hallway.

INT. STONE HOUSE - DOWNSTAIRS BATHROOM - DAY

Julie struggles with a bar of soap under the running tap.

MEREDITH
What's wrong? What are you doing?

JULIE
Oh, Meredith!

Julie holds up her red, swollen hand for Meredith to see.

MEREDITH
What is that?

JULIE
It's your wedding ring.

Meredith blinks.

INT. STONE HOUSE - BACK HALL - DAY

Everyone is still idly clustered here.

MEREDITH (O.S.)
OH, MY GOD!! JULIE!

SYBIL
Maybe we should give them a little room.

INT. STONE HOUSE - DOWNSTAIRS BATHROOM - DAY

MEREDITH
(miserable)
He's going to propose!

JULIE
If I can get the ring off.

MEREDITH
What are *you* doing with my wedding ring?

JULIE
It's stuck! He wanted to see it on!

MEREDITH
Why'd he want to see it on you?

JULIE
(changing subject)
Where were you last night?

Meredith looks at Julie and then drops her eyes.

MEREDITH
I can't tell you.

JULIE
What do you mean, you can't tell me?
(slowly it dawns on her)
No.

Meredith nods with feigned remorse.

JULIE (CONT'D)
Meredith, *no*. You didn't--

Meredith begins to smile, involuntarily. Mischievously.

MEREDITH
I'm so ashamed.

INT. STONE HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Kelly shoves Ben into the room ahead of him.

BEN
Jesus, Kelly! *What?* What'd I do?

Kelly wags a finger at Ben but abandons a speech as everyone trails in behind them.

KELLY
(sternly, warningly)
I'm watching you, Mister.

SUSANNAH
How'd she get it on her finger in the first place?

EVERETT
Well, I...

The doorbell rings.

Everyone's head, but Thad's, swings in the direction of the front door.

AMY
Now who the hell is that?

EXT. STONE HOUSE - FRONT STEPS - DAY

Brad Stevenson stands nervously at the front door, holding a poinsettia plant and a brightly wrapped gift. He blows on his hands.

BRAD
(practicing)
Amy. Amy. Amy. Amy.

Brad turns on the porch, looking out to his ambulance, parked at the street's curb.

Amy opens the front door and Brad spins back around.

AMY
Brad?

BRAD
Amy. Merry Christmas.

AMY
Brad, what are you doing here?

A beat.

BRAD
Meredith invited me.

INT. STONE HOUSE - DOWNSTAIRS BATHROOM - DAY

MEREDITH
I know! It's terrible! Don't you think I know?!

JULIE
Why did you bring me here?!

MEREDITH
Don't yell at me! I needed my sister!

JULIE
Oh, Meredith! How *could* you?

MEREDITH
(miserable)
I know! I know!
(a beat)
Let me see the ring again.

Julie raises her hand for Meredith to look.

MEREDITH
That's it?

INT. STONE HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Elizabeth carries a present to Ben, who shakes it.

BEN
What do you think it is?

Amy and Brad enter the living room.

AMY
(on the war path)
Alright! Is Meredith out of the can yet?

BEN SYBIL
Brad! Brad!

Brad nods to everyone and gives Sybil the poinsettia.

BRAD
Hey, Ben. Mrs. Stone. Mr. Stone. Merry Christmas, everyone. I hope I'm not interrupting. You see, I--

Meredith and Julie enter.

AMY
Here she is! Meredith, you know Brad.

MEREDITH
Oh my god. I forgot--!

Everett looks to Julie, who hides her hand and shakes her head.

AMY
Meredith, would you care to share with everyone just how it is that you know Brad?

BRAD
We were all at O'Malley's last night.

EVERETT
(to Meredith)
You guys were at O'Malley's?

Ben opens the box in his lap and holds up a tweed jacket.

BEN
Houndstooth, right? Houndstooth?

SUSANNAH
Filene's basement.

BEN
Nice!

MEREDITH
Let's open presents!

Everett steps in close to Meredith.

EVERETT
Presents can wait. I think you and I need to talk.

MEREDITH
Me next! Me next!

Meredith skitters away from Everett, drawing a large canvas bag from beneath the tree.

MEREDITH (CONT'D)
I have something for everyone!

From the bag she pulls identical flat boxes, handing one to each of the adults.

Everyone just looks at the boxes in their laps.

MEREDITH (CONT'D)
Well, open them.

Susannah starts, getting Elizabeth to help.

Nearly at the same time, everyone unwraps the same framed photograph of Sybil, taken sometime in the early '70's, pregnant with one of the children.

It's a black and white portrait, undoubtedly taken by Kelly.

MEREDITH (CONT'D)
I found the original in Everett's desk. I just thought it was so beautiful.

Everyone just stares, unprepared for Meredith's thoughtfulness, this sudden intimacy.

Kelly, sitting on the arm of the couch, breaks the stillness by reaching out and caressing his wife.

Sybil turns from Kelly and wags her framed picture at Amy.

SYBIL
(softly)
That's you and me, kid.

Amy looks up, her eyes swimming.

SYBIL
You and me.

Amy nods, lip trembling.

MEREDITH
(in apology)
Oh. I--I just assumed it must have been Everett.

KELLY
(to Meredith)
Thank you very much.

SYBIL
Meredith, you did good.

Meredith exhales and smiles, taking it in.

AMY
Meredith...I...

Amy's throat closes on her words. She merely shakes her head and lowers it.

EVERETT
(leaning in, voice lowered)
Meredith, we've got to--

Meredith steps closer into Everett and lowers her voice.

MEREDITH
Everett, *please*. I *know* what you're going to ask me.

Everett grabs Meredith by the wrist.

EVERETT
That's just my point. I don't think you do.

MEREDITH
Brad! You look hungry! I'll just go pop the strada in the oven--

EVERETT
Meredith--!

Meredith pulls against Everett's grip.

MEREDITH
Everett, *please*, don't!

EVERETT
Meredith, will--?

MEREDITH
Everett--!

EVERETT
Meredith! Will you *please*--

MEREDITH
No, Everett, I will not marry you!

EVERETT
--stop talking and *listen?*!
(responding)
What?

MEREDITH
I'm *sorry*, Everett. I *can't* marry you.

Everett looks around the room and releases Meredith.

EVERETT
I...I didn't ask you.

MEREDITH
You--what?

EVERETT
You said--. I'm not asking you to marry me.

MEREDITH
I--. You're not? You didn't--?

Everett shakes his head slowly.

Meredith turns to Julie, who looks at her helplessly.

Meredith focuses on the ring on Julie's finger.

Julie covers the ring with her other hand.

Meredith turns back to the room, to Everett.

MEREDITH (CONT'D)
(nodding)
Well, that's just great. Isn't it? That's just perfect. Not like I haven't been humiliated enough--?

EVERETT
Meredith, it's not like that--

MEREDITH
Oh, it's not?
(facing the room)
This isn't *exactly* the moment you've all been waiting for? You all *hate* me so much!

KELLY
Meredith, that's not true--

MEREDITH
Oh, I know what you all see!
(a beat)
Meredith. The spoiled. Crazy. Racist. Bigot. Bitch from Bedford!
(increasingly vulnerable)
Right? That's what you all *think*. That's what you all *see*, when you look at me. Not good enough for Everett. Not like all of you.
(mimicking)
"She comes all the way up here to ruin our Christmas and then she sleeps with his brother!"

It's out before she knows it.

EVERETT
What?

MEREDITH
(almost inaudibly)
I slept with your brother.

EVERETT
You slept with who?

KELLY
With "whom--"

THAD
Do not look at me!

MEREDITH
With Ben! I slept with Ben!

BEN
Whoa!! Back up a minute! Everett, I didn't--!

MEREDITH
Oh, what's the use?

BEN
Meredith, *we* did *not* sleep together.

MEREDITH
We didn't?

BEN
(as if by sad apology)
No.

A long beat as Meredith works to take this in.

MEREDITH
Isn't there ANYBODY that loves me?!

Meredith flees the room.

Everett turns to Julie.

INT. STONE HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Meredith opens the refrigerator door and crouches, sniffling, in front of her strada pans, trying to pull herself together.

INT. STONE HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Sybil hands the framed photo to Kelly as she gets up

SYBIL
(to Ben)
Nice one!

BEN
Me?

SYBIL
Yeah, you!

Amy shakes her head and gets up, following Sybil.

INT. STONE HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Nerve wracked, Meredith tries to remove the two trays of strada from the fridge. Her grip is precarious.

INT. STONE HOUSE - FRONT HALL - DAY

Sybil and Amy hit the swinging kitchen door.

INT. STONE HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

The swinging door bangs into the back of the refrigerator door which strikes Meredith as she turns.

Suddenly, she's juggling the trays of strada.

One hits the floor, spraying egg batter across the linoleum.

INT. STONE HOUSE - FRONT HALL - DAY

Sybil slowly pushes the swinging door open, to reveal Meredith, drenched in eggs, clutching the second strada pan to her chest.

SYBIL
(laughs)
Oh, NO!

AMY
Meredith!

INT. STONE HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Ben stands, buttoning his sport-coat as Everett turns to face him.

BEN
Okay. Look. Everett. I just want you to know--

Everett lunges for Ben who takes off running.

INT. STONE HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Sybil tries to comfort Meredith, who pathetically picks egg-soaked bread cut outs from her front, as Amy crouches with dishrags to mop up the pool of eggs.

SYBIL
Let's just get you cleaned up--

MEREDITH
(weeping)
I'm *just as good* as any of you!

SYBIL
Of course you are. Better probably.

INT. STONE HOUSE - LIVING ROOM

Everett chases Ben back toward the living room where they dodge and feint around the two entrances.

Kelly gets up and tries to grab Everett.

Ben double-feints and bolts. Everett takes off after him.

INT. STONE HOUSE - DINING ROOM - DAY

Everett chases Ben through the house, until they are on opposite sides of the dining room table.

INT. STONE HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Kelly exits for the dining room.

Brad half-rises and extends a hand toward Julie.

BRAD
I'm sorry, I don't think we met. I'm Brad.

JULIE
(stunned by events)
Julie.

BRAD
Nice to meet you.

INT. STONE HOUSE - KITCHEN DAY

MEREDITH
What's so great about you guys?

SYBIL
Nothing. We're just all that we've got.

AMY
Yeah, and we're not so great.

MEREDITH
And you! You're *the worst*!

AMY
I'm the worst?

INT. STONE HOUSE - DINING ROOM - DAY

As Everett advances, Ben retreats, maintaining an equal distance between them around the table.

BEN
I didn't do it! I swear! Nothing happened!

EVERETT
Then stop running from me!

BEN
Stop chasing me! I didn't do anything!

EVERETT
Then how can she think she slept with you?

BEN
Well, we were pretty wasted--

KELLY
Okay, boys, that's enough of this nonsense!

Kelly enters the dining room, stepping in front of Everett, blocking him.

Ben dashes around the table for the kitchen's swinging door.

INT. STONE HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

The door flies open, and Ben sails into the room, skidding in the eggs, crashing into Amy.

Amy is thrown toward Sybil and Meredith at the sink.

INT. STONE HOUSE - DINING ROOM - DAY

Everett wrestles himself away from Kelly, dashes for the other swinging kitchen door in the hall.

INT. STONE HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Amy, Sybil and Meredith hit the ground together.

Everett blasts into the kitchen, throwing himself on Ben.

Together, they crash into the kitchen table, falling to the floor.

Kelly enters the kitchen to find the women on the floor by the sink and Everett and Ben wrestling beneath the kitchen table.

An enormous turkey in a steel roasting pan and all the preparations for Christmas dinner cling precariously to the table's canted surface.

BEN
Ow! Everett not the jacket! Not the jacket!

Ben shoves Everett off him.

EVERETT
How could you do that to me?

BEN
I didn't *do* anything to you. She was passed out. I slept on the floor. Nothing happened.

Everett grabs up the label of Ben's jacket in his fist.

EVERETT
You swear?

BEN
You don't even love her. You don't even love her, man.

Everett pushes Ben violently away, knocking him against the table's center support. The turkey and dinner begin their slide.

MEREDITH
Ben! Everett!

The entire table overturns, crashing down on Everett and Ben.

EXT. STONE HOUSE - DAY

Brad Stevenson climbs out of the back door of his ambulance, with a large first aid kit, and heads for the house.

INT. STONE HOUSE - FRONT HALL - DAY

Brad enters through the front door, heading for the stairs.

He doesn't see Julie as she ducks into the phone nook beneath the stairs, clutching an open Yellow Pages, speaking on the phone.

JULIE
To Bedford, yes. Okay. Five-thirty. And that's from the Common? Okay. Thanks. You, too. Merry Christmas.

Julie hangs up the phone.

As she turns her wrist to read the face of her watch, the ring slips from her finger and strikes the surface of the nook's shelf.

Julie looks down at the ring.

INT. STONE HOUSE - EVERETT'S BATHROOM - DAY

Everett examines a scratch on his cheek as he towels his hair dry and pulls on a sweatshirt.

INT. STONE HOUSE - EVERETT'S BEDROOM - DAY

Everett opens the bathroom door to find Meredith sitting silently on the edge of the foot of his bed.

She holds an ice pack up to her right eye, which is swollen shut and turning colors.

Everett looks at her for a moment, then wearily sits on the edge of his bed, as far from Meredith as possible.

Meredith clears her throat loudly in the silent room.

MEREDITH
Everett, I'm sorry--

EVERETT
No, I'm sorry for everything.

Meredith examines her ice pack, by way of not looking at Everett.

MEREDITH
You don't hate me, do you?

EVERETT
No. Of course, not.

EXT. STONE HOUSE - STREET - SUNSET

Amy approaches the open back door of Brad's ambulance.

Brad stows his kit inside.

Amy knocks on the open door.

Brad turns and smiles at her.

Amy holds up the wrapped present he'd brought.

AMY
Was this for me?

INT. STONE HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DUSK

Everett enters with Susannah, to find Elizabeth alone, playing with her new toys.

EVERETT
Elizabeth, have you seen Julie?

ELIZABETH
(quickly)
No.

SUSANNAH
Elizabeth, where did you get that ring?

Elizabeth clutches the ring on her hand to her chest.

SUSANNAH (CONT'D)
(sternly warning)
Elizabeth--

ELIZABETH
She said to give it to Everett.
She said to say goodbye.

INT. AMBULANCE - DUSK

Amy holds up the snow globe Brad has given her.

The scene depicted within is that of a small figure pulling a child's sled across a New England landscape.

AMY
Wow, Brad.

She turns the globe, creating a blizzard within the sphere.

Just then her eyes is drawn by Everett as he flies from the front door, pulling on his coat.

AMY
What's he doing?

BRAD
Who?

Everett reaches the street and scans its length up and down. He decides on a direction and takes off at run.

At the same time, Kelly's car rockets backwards into the street from the far side of the driveway.

AMY
Where are they going?

Amy lunges across Brad to the driver's window as Kelly hits the accelerator and the car speeds away.

Amy holds her position, leaning across Brad, her hand braced on his chest.

She slowly turns her head and meets Brad's eyes.

Brad smiles at Amy, her face just inches away from his.

EXT. RESIDENTIAL STREET - DUSK

Everett runs along the silent street.

From behind him, Kelly's car pulls along side, keeping pace.

Thad reaches around and opens the back passenger door.

KELLY
Get in!

INT. STONE HOUSE - BEN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Meredith comes to sit on the edge of Ben's bed, where he lies, bandaged, propped up by pillows beneath a quilt.

A beat.

Ben lifts a hand to gently touch Meredith's black eye.

Meredith traces the cut above his eye.

BEN
A pair.

He tugs gently at her blouse.

BEN (CONT'D)
What do you say you get out of these clothes?

Meredith looks at Ben.

BEN (CONT'D)
You smell a little like puke.

EXT. INN - NIGHT

Everett comes racing out of the inn to Kelly's car, where Kelly and Thad sit in the front seats.

EVERETT
(scanning the street)
Did you guys see her? The guy just said--

Over the roof of the car, Everett sees across the Common, where Julie lugs her heavy suitcase to the bus stop.

Kelly and Thad turn in the car, following Everett's gaze.

EXT. TOWN COMMON - NIGHT

A thin flurry of snowflakes buzz around the globe of a streetlight, like summer moths.

Beneath the streetlight, Julie stands alone, waiting for her bus. She cranes out over the curb, looking down the length of the street.

EVERETT
Julie!

Startled, Julie looks directly across the street, where Everett stands on the edge of the Common.

The bus turns the distant corner and moves slowly toward them. They both look as it approaches.

INT. KELLY'S CAR - NIGHT

Kelly and Thad watch Everett cross the street to Julie.

EXT. TOWN COMMON - NIGHT

EVERETT
You didn't even say good bye.

JULIE
You were a little busy.

EVERETT
Julie--

JULIE
Well. My bus is here.

The bus pulls up with a pneumatic hiss and the driver gets off.

DRIVER
(lifting Julie's bag)
Merry Christmas. Can I take this for you?

JULIE
Merry Christmas. Thanks.

Julie follows the driver.

Everett reaches for her.

EVERETT
No. You can't go.

JULIE
Everett--

EVERETT
Please. Stay, Julie.

She stops, regarding Everett, searching.

JULIE
It's...it's too much.

EVERETT
(smiling)
No. It's not.

He steps in, close. Julie doesn't resist.

EVERETT
It's not too much.

Everett places his forehead on Julie's.

EVERETT
Stay.

Julie closes her eyes as Everett rocks them in place, gently swaying.

EVERETT
Just stay.

INT. KELLY'S CAR - NIGHT

Kelly and Thad strain to see, but their view is obscured by stopped bus.

Then the bus begins to move, pulling away, to reveal Everett, standing alone beneath the streetlight.

EXT. TOWN COMMON - NIGHT

Everett watches the bus as it trundles away from him, down the empty street.

Suddenly, the brake lights are illuminated.

Everett takes off.

Running.

Across the Common.

He reaches the stopped bus, racing down its length for the front.

Julie rounds the other side of the bus, meeting Everett in front of the headlights.

They embrace.

EVERETT
Julie...

JULIE
Everett...I...

EVERETT
Julie...

JULIE
I just...I wanted to ask if you were doing anything for New Years.

Everett laughs and pulls Julie to him.

INT. STONE HOUSE - BEN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Meredith lifts her head from the pillow she shares with Ben as he slips his arm around her, under her neck.

BEN
Comfortable?

Meredith nods. She's changed into a concert T-shirt, surely one of Ben's.

Lying on top of the covers, they both look at the ceiling, watching the shadows cast by the falling snow outside.

Quietly, Meredith begins to hum "Joy to the World." Ben follows her lead.

Meredith breaks off from the song and turns, burrowing deeper into Ben's side.

Ben continues to watch the shadows from the snow.

BEN
(to himself)
"Repeat the sounding joy."

EXT. STONE HOUSE - NIGHT

Sybil stands at the kitchen window watching the snow falling outside.

INT. STONE HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Behind Sybil, Patrick pulls the turkey from the oven and sets it on the stove.

PATRICK
Sybil.

JOHN (O.S.)
Hello?! Merry Christmas!

ELIZABETH
Daddy! Daddy!

SUSANNAH
John!

JOHN TROUSDALE enters. He is sleek and handsome in a suit and top coat. He is in his late thirties or early forties. He lifts Elizabeth when she throws herself into him.

JOHN
Merry Christmas!

SUSANNAH
John.

John crosses to Susannah and they kiss. Susannah hugs him a little tighter.

JOHN
Okay. Let's start with, who's the guy Amy's making out with in the ambulance?

Patrick gently lays a hand on Sybil's shoulder.

PATRICK
Sybil.

Sybil turns from the dark glass of the window, slowly focusing on Patrick.

PATRICK (CONT'D)
It's ready.

Sybil smiles softly.

SYBIL
It's snowing.

EXT. TOWN COMMON - NIGHT

All alone, seemingly in the very center of the snow storm, Everett continues moving across the Common to Kelly's car.

Slowly, a smile finds its way onto his face.

And then he grins.

FADE TO BLACK.

FADE IN:

EXT. STONE HOUSE - DAY

The house sits back on a snowy lawn.

A Range Rover pulls up in the driveway to the left side of the house, near the side kitchen door and its steps.

Thad and Patrick climb out of the car.

Patrick goes to the back of the car and unloads groceries.

Thad opens one of the rear passenger doors and lifts their AFRICAN-AMERICAN INFANT from a child carrier. He shoulders a diaper bag.

INT. STONE HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Thad and Patrick enter the mud room.

SUSANNAH
(calling)
Hey, you guys!

Turning the corner they find Susannah stringing popcorn and cranberries at the kitchen table, her BABY BOY, ANDREW in her arms.

SUSANNAH (CONT'D)
Look, Andrew! It's your cousin Gus!

Thad brings Gus over to the table as Patrick sets the groceries on the counter.

THAD
Are Everett and Julie here yet?

SUSANNAH
They called a while ago. They said they'd be here in time for dinner.

KELLY
Thad! Patrick!

Kelly enters through the basement door in the back hall, followed by Amy. They both carry old cardboard cartons of ornaments and paper chain.

THAD
Dad!

Kelly puts his carton down and embraces everyone. He takes Gus from Thad, holding him aloft.

KELLY
Would you look at this young man? He is the king of kings! King Gus!

SUSANNAH
(to Amy)
Any luck?

AMY
(shaking her head)
Still can't find the stockings.

BRAD (O.S.)
We're ready!

INT. STONE HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

AMY
We've got more ornaments!

Amy enters carrying some of the cardboard cartons, followed by Kelly holding Gus, and the rest.

Meredith and Elizabeth abandon their tree trimming to greet the new arrivals.

BEN
Is everybody set?

Ben holds an extension cord and the cord to the lights of the still-dark Christmas tree.

John Trousdale makes an adjustment to a string of lights.

JOHN
Brad? You done?

Brad, on a ladder, adjustments the lights at the top of the tree.

BRAD
Got it.

BEN
"And now," cried Max, "let the wild rumpus start!"

Ben connects the cords and the tree springs to life with light.

Everyone voices their appreciation in "Ah"s.

Susannah looks at Kelly, who stands silently holding Gus, taking in the tree.

SUSANNAH
It's a good tree, Daddy.

Kelly nods, encircling his daughter's waist with one arm, looking down at Gus in his other.

KELLY
It is.

The room is still, everyone watching Kelly.

KELLY (CONT'D)
It is a very good tree.

Elizabeth unwraps the snowflake ornament from tissue and holds it up for Meredith.

ELIZABETH
Look at this one!

Meredith takes the ornament and delivers it to Amy.

MEREDITH
Amy.

Amy takes the ornament from Meredith, turns the snowflake in her hand.

The back door bangs open.

EVERETT (O.S.)
Hello! Anyone home?

SUSANNAH
They're here!

JULIE (O.S.)
Merry Christmas!

Everyone heads out of the room to greet Everett and Julie, leaving Amy, holding the ornament, and Brad, who begins to climb down from the ladder.

Brad hesitates in his descent, seeing Amy staring into the depths of the tree.

He watches as she moves forward and hangs the snowflake ornament with elaborate care.

She steps back and regards the tree.

BRAD
You okay?

Amy turns to Brad and nods, smiling, though tears hang in her eyes.

Brad climbs down from the ladder, revealing the framed portrait of Sybil, pregnant with Amy, that hangs on the wall behind him.

In the reflection of the frame's glass, Brad goes to Amy.

They kiss lightly, and Amy snakes her arms around Brad, hugging him. Together, the two walk toward the kitchen and the bright call of family voices.

Slowly, the focus shifts, until the photograph of Sybil is clear at last.

FADE TO BLACK.